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War of Words: Daniel Defoe and the 1707 Union

Anne M. McKim

Thus, on both Sides, the case stood between the nations, a Pen and Ink War made a daily Noise in either Kingdom, and this served to Exasperate the People in such a manner, one against another, that never have two Nations Run upon one another in such a manner, and come off without Blows.¹

The Union of Scotland and England on 1 May 1707 was—and for some still is—undoubtedly contentious. Polemic and political pamphleteering flourished at the time, reflecting and fanning the debate, while the newssheets and journals of the day provided lively opinion pieces and a good deal of propaganda. Recent commentators have recognised the importance of public discourse and public opinion regarding the Union on the way to the treaty. Leith Davis goes as far as to say that the ‘new British nation was constructed from the dialogue that took place regarding its potential existence’.²

While the treaty articles were still being debated by the last Scottish parliament, Daniel Defoe, who had gone to Scotland specifically to promote the Union, began compiling his monumental *History of the Union of Great Britain* in Edinburgh.³ He expected to see it published before the end of 1707 although, for reasons that are still not entirely clear, it was not published until late 1709 or early 1710.⁴ As David Hayton notes, ‘a great deal of it must already have

¹ Daniel Defoe, *The History of the Union of Great Britain*, D. W. Hayton (ed.) (2 vols., London, 2002), I, 124.

² Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation 1707–1830* (Stanford, 1998), 22. See also Karin Bowie, ‘Public Opinion, Popular Politics and the Union of 1707’, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 82 (2003), 226–60.

³ He had already promoted the Union in his journal, the *Review*, and also published several pro-union tracts in London, including two *Essays at Removing National Prejudices against a Union with Scotland*, in April and October 1706.

⁴ In the *Review* published on 24 December 1706 Defoe claimed he was working on the *History*. By the end of January 1707 he had begun a subscription for it and before the end of March he announced that he had a ‘great part of it finished’. *Review*, 29 March 1707 in Daniel Defoe, *Defoe’s Review, A Facsimile Edition*, Arthur Wellesley Secord (ed.) (9 vols., Columbia, 1938), III, 611; Hayton, ‘Introduction’ in Defoe, *History of the*

been printed by January 1708' when the Reverend James Clark of Glasgow, who had evidently read the account given there of anti-union riots in Glasgow in late 1706, accused Defoe of misrepresenting and maligning him, prompting a heated pamphlet exchange that continued into 1710.⁵ Even before it was published, Defoe's *History of the Union* was therefore controversial which, as I propose to demonstrate, was about the last thing he would have wanted.

This essay takes a close look at the language Defoe employed in his *History of the Union*, the language of persuasion, and perhaps also of propaganda, and in particular at some of the rhetorical figures and strategies he had refined as a journalist and pamphleteer. Some of the language he used provoked a small pamphlet war, in which his very words were flung back at him. In the second part of this essay I consider how Defoe handled outstanding Scottish historical grievances at the time of the Union, by examining his account of one of the most contentious political issues of the day, the Darien disaster, before offering some conclusions about the insights afforded by such a historical-linguistic analysis.

Defoe's reputation as a polemicist is well known and, while he attracted more censure than praise in his own day—and for some time afterwards—more recently he has been acknowledged as 'England's chief pamphleteer of the Union of 1707', a 'highly professional writer and skilled propagandist' who 'made the biggest contribution to unionist propaganda on either side of the border'.⁶ Through his pro-union pamphlets and journalism he 'became directly involved in answering Scottish pamphleteers. . . [thus] further developing his rhetoric regarding the nation'.⁷ An enthusiastic, versatile and prolific controversialist, nevertheless in the *History of the Union* Defoe criticised 'the writers of the age' for dividing the nation, and went on to identify some of

Union, I, 10; *Defoe's Review*, IV, 84. When it was finally published, there were certainly problems with the order of the parts of the *History*, for which Defoe apologised in his Preface, explaining: 'The various times in which the several parts were wrote, even some before others were acted, were the true reason of the irregular placing of the pieces'. Separate numbering of the main sections indicates that these were printed separately, some probably early in 1708. See Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 10 and 388, and Michael Fry, *The Union: England, Scotland and the Treaty of 1707* (Edinburgh, 2006), 206.

⁵ Hayton, 'Introduction' in Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 10.

⁶ Katherine R. Penovich, 'From "Revolution Principles" to Union: Daniel Defoe's Intervention in the Scottish Debate' in John Robertson (ed.), *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707* (Cambridge, 1995), 240; Christopher A. Whatley, *The Scots and the Union* (Edinburgh, 2006), 290; Fry, *The Union*, 206.

⁷ Davis, *Acts of Union*, 25–6; Bowie, 'Public Opinion', 259.

the main perpetrators of the 'pen and ink war'. This 'war' often involved disparagement of the opposition writers, who were commonly dubbed 'scribblers'. Defoe himself was accused of being a hired pen, a government hack, and an 'impudent scribler' because of his pro-union pamphlets and journalism and, in accordance with the rules of engagement, he in turn accused opponents of being 'insolent Scribblers'.⁸ Indeed, much of the published writing produced by the Union debate can certainly be described as 'the literature of contention'.⁹

Defoe's pro-union propaganda in his pamphlets and the *Review*, and his *History of the Union*, express the same desire to move beyond the ancient feuds and animosities, the national aversions and breaches that kept the kingdoms divided, and which were so often invoked by anti-union propagandists. While Defoe's *History of the Union* may well be considered part of the pro-union propaganda campaign since, even after the passage of the Act of Union in 1707, debate was ongoing, and while Defoe continued to advocate for it in his other writings, it is notable that in this work he attempted to close down the debate.¹⁰ '[I]t is not my design', he wrote, 'to make this History a Dispute'. In the Preface to the *History* he explicitly undertook 'to *speake* Truth, and *relate* Fact *Impartially* in all that is Matter of History'.¹¹ He reiterated this claim throughout the work as well as affirming that his purpose was elucidation not contention, usually in phrases such as 'setting the matter in a clear light' because he wanted 'to convey the right understanding of these matters to posterity'.¹² His emphasis on factuality, impartiality and elucidation was conventional. As Backscheider notes, many early eighteenth-century historians 'emphasised the objective presentation of evidence'.¹³ Davis suggests that Defoe also wanted to associate the success of the Union with the success of a new style of narrative, one written as from the eye of an impartial observer, hence his reminder to his readers: 'I was an eye-witness to it all'.¹⁴ But, as one recent historian has

⁸ Defoe's *Review*, 2 September 1707, IV, 347; Anonymous, *The Review Review'd*, re-printed in Maximillian E. Novak, 'A Whiff of Scandal in the Life of Daniel Defoe', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 34 (1970), 38; *Review*, V, Preface.

⁹ Davis, *Acts of Union*, 21 citing William Ferguson, *Scotland's Relations with England: A Survey to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1977), 222.

¹⁰ Hayton, 'Introduction' in Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 25.

¹¹ Defoe, *History of the Union*, 80.

¹² *Ibid.*, 112.

¹³ Paula R. Backscheider, 'Cross-Purposes: Defoe's *History of the Union*', *Clio*, 11 (1982), 166.

¹⁴ Defoe, *History of the Union*, 45. Davis, *Acts of Union*, 43. The title page of the 1712 London edition of Defoe's *History of the Union* advertised the work as being 'by a

observed, despite 'Defoe's efforts to produce a balanced analysis, his *History* struck his critics then as now as unmistakably, and unforgivably, the work of an English propagandist'.¹⁵ To his chagrin, Defoe found his claims to impartiality, clear understanding and 'matter of fact' history challenged even before the *History of the Union* was published.

Hayton describes the *History of the Union* as 'first and foremost a *pièce d'occasion*, whose purpose was to persuade'.¹⁶ In it Defoe also celebrated the culmination of the Union project, most evidently in his dedications to Queen Anne and the duke of Queensberry, but also throughout the work in the many references to the Union as this 'happy transaction' and 'glorious conjunction'. His account of the debate that accompanied the passage of the treaty articles forms the central sections of the *History*.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the substantial preliminary sections (that is, the Preface, 'A General History of Unions' and 'Of Affairs in Both Kingdoms') provide the historical background and contexts he believed were necessary for a clear understanding of what he presented as the inevitable and providential conjunction of the two kingdoms:

In order to come to a clear Understanding in the whole Frame of this wonderful Transaction, THE UNION, 'tis necessary to let the reader into the very Original of it, and Enquire where the first Springs are to be found, from whence this mighty Transaction has been Form'd.

And tho' this will of course lead us back a great way in History, yet it will carry this Advantage along with it, that we shall see all the several Steps which have been taken, how Providence has led the Nation, as it were, by the Hand.¹⁸

And at the beginning of the next section, 'Of Affairs in Both Kingdoms':

Before I enter upon the Proceedings in the Reign of Queen ANNE, towards a General Union of these Kingdoms, it is absolutely necessary to the right Understanding of Things, to take a short View of the Posture of Publick Affairs in the respective Kingdoms, and what it was that rendered the Union so absolutely Necessary at this Time, that to

person concern'd in the said treaty, and present in both kingdoms at the time of its transacting'.

¹⁵ Whatley, *Scots and the Union*, 23.

¹⁶ Hayton, 'Introduction' in Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13; Backscheider, 'Cross-Purposes', 169.

¹⁸ Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 1.

all Considering People, who made any tolerable Judgment of Things, it was plain, there was no other way left, to prevent the most Bloody War that ever had been between the two Nations.¹⁹

Defoe presented the Union as the only solution to age-old warring, and the only way to prevent internecine conflict breaking out once again. The *History of the Union* was a way of 'writing the nation into union'.²⁰ Whereas 'Writers of the Age' had exacerbated old wounds and contributed to deteriorating relations between the two countries, Defoe believed his pen would serve to heal the breach: 'My Desire being to heal, not exasperate' as he wrote in the Preface to the fifth collected volume of his *Review*.²¹

Military images abound in union literature. George Lockhart's assertion that 'all true Scotsmen looked upon it [the Union] as a gross Invasion on their Liberties and Sovereignty' is fairly representative, especially of the anti-unionists.²² The Scottish pamphleteer and London-based journalist, George Ridpath, who later became a leading propagandist for the opposition or Country party, expressed the view that Scots should 'defend with their pens what their ancestors maintained so gallantly with their swords'.²³ As we have seen in the quotation at the beginning of this article, Defoe deplored the 'pen and ink war', yet his own fondness for such figures finds its way into his *History*. He wrote, for example, of the 'jealousies on both sides about church affairs, in respect to the Union' which 'lay like a secret mine, with which that party who designed to keep the nation divided, were sure to blow it up at last'.²⁴ His appreciation of the paradox is evident in the 29 March 1707 *Review* issue where he rejoiced in the sound of 'the guns proclaiming the happy conjunction from Edinburgh Castle' as he wrote, going on to exclaim that 'the thunder of warlike engines cry peace; and what is made to divide and destroy, speaks out the language of this glorious conjunction!'²⁵

One of the most contentious issues in the Union debate was whether, if there were to be a union of Scotland and England, an incorporating or

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 112.

²⁰ Davis, *Acts of Union*, 40.

²¹ *Defoe's Review*, V, unpaginated.

²² George Lockhart, *Memoirs concerning the Affairs of Scotland* (London, 1714), 135.

²³ Cited by John Robertson, 'An Elusive Sovereignty: The Course of the Union Debate in Scotland, 1698–1707' in idem (ed.), *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the Union of 1707* (Cambridge, 1995), 199.

²⁴ Defoe, *History of the Union*, 125.

²⁵ *Defoe's Review*, IV, 81.

federal union offered the most benefits. Defoe consistently advocated an incorporating union:

If our Union be partial, federal, periodical or indeed notional, as most of those schemes have been, then the defects may be so also: one part may thrive, and another decay; and Scotland would be but too sensible of that, in those sorts of union.

But if the Union be an incorporation, a union according to the extent of the letter, it must then be a union of the very soul of the nation, all its constitution, customs, trade and manners, must be blended together, digested and concocted, for the mutual united, undistinguish't, good, growth and health of the one, whole, united body; and this I understand by Union.²⁶

Defoe had used the 'united body' metaphor in earlier tracts, and continued to do so for some years after the Treaty of Union had been ratified and legislated.²⁷ Here, in the third part of his *Essay at Removing National Prejudices Against a Union*, published very soon after he arrived in Scotland, he made a case for incorporation designed to appeal to wavering or unconvinced Scots. Not only is the Union as a healthy body a favourite reiterated figure in his political writings, but he also adopted incorporating practices when he promoted this concept of union in his writing.

His critics soon recognised Defoe's tendency not only to repeat himself, but to quote his own words. One wit called him 'the greatest *Tautologist* in the World', for 'you, having writ more books than you have read, must quote your own dear impudent self, or nothing at all'.²⁸ Davis has drawn attention to the way that 'Defoe incorporates and changes the arguments

²⁶ Daniel Defoe, *An Essay at Removing National Prejudices Against a Union with England*, Part III. ([Edinburgh], 1706) in Daniel Defoe, *The Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, J. A. Downie, P. N. Furbank, W. R. Owens, D. W. Hayton and John McVeagh (eds) (8 vols., London, 2000), IV, 94.

²⁷ See, for example, Part II of his *Essay at Removing National Prejudices* (London, 1706) and Daniel Defoe, *Union and no Union* (London, 1713). Pamphlets by Scottish incorporators often referred to the desirability of the nations becoming one body, as for example, George Mackenzie of Cromarty, *Two Letters concerning the Present Union, from a Peer in Scotland to a Peer in England* (Edinburgh, 1706), 15, 28; David Symson, *Sir George M'Kenzie's Arguments against an Incorporating Union, particularly Considered* (Edinburgh, 1706), 15; William Seton of Pitmedden, *Scotland's Great Advantages by a Union with England* (Edinburgh?, 1706).

²⁸ Anonymous, *The Review Review'd* cited in Novak, 'A Whiff of Scandal', 38.

of his opponents into his own perspective' in the various parts of his *Essay at Removing National Prejudices*.²⁹ The same, I think, can be said of his *History*, for there he incorporated the Union debate itself, the arguments *pro* and *con*, as part of his 'balanced analysis'.³⁰ He even incorporated into his own text the whole of Lord Belhaven's famous anti-union speech of 2 November 1706, a speech he had earlier satirised, instigating a whole debate in verse, a 'flyting'.³¹ He also inserted material from his own earlier pamphlets, including the various essays aimed at dispelling national prejudices, as well as from his *Review* articles; and he included revised accounts of Scottish resistance to union he observed at first hand, and that he originally penned as secret reports to his employer, Robert Harley, the English Secretary of State for Scotland.³²

I Victory in the 'Lists of Concertation'?

It seems, however, that Defoe's repeated efforts to persuade readers of the benefits of uniting the kingdoms, and to counter opponents' arguments by containing them through his careful, and deliberately exemplary, incorporation of these in his *History*, only drew further charges from his critics, one of whom could not resist turning Defoe's favourite metaphor against him when

²⁹ Davis, *Acts of Union*, 25. He also followed this practice in his *Review*, where he sometimes cited specific caustic comments, or published hostile letters. In his obituary for his former opponent, Lord Belhaven, he quoted the late baron in a way that not only demonstrated Belhaven's magnanimity but also illustrated how old antagonists could be reconciled despite a history of differences, as was the case with Defoe and Belhaven: 'I confess, I thought you gave yourself too much liberty in bantering me and my speech in your writings, especially in your Introduction to that of my Lord H[aversha]ms; yet by what I have seen of your other writings, you are of the same sentiments with me as to government, &c, and, except in the matter of Union, you are a man after my own heart.' *Defoes Review*, V, 182.

³⁰ Whatley, *Scots and the Union*, 23.

³¹ For a discussion of this, see David Macaree, 'The Flyting of Daniel Defoe and Lord Belhaven', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 13 (1978), 72–80. See also Davis, *Acts of Union*, 30–40.

³² For example, Hayton notes that the first section of the *History*, 'A General History of Unions' rewrites and expands on the first part of Defoe's *Essay at Removing National Prejudices*. Hayton, 'Introduction' in Defoe, *History of the Union*, 12. For examples of how Defoe incorporated material from his *Review* and his letters to Harley into the *History of the Union* see Anne McKim, 'Adapting News and Making History: Defoe's News Discourse and the *History of the Union*' in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *News Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Bern, 2006), 255–72.

he attacked him for producing an 'indigested corpulent History'.³³ Adopting a chivalric figure of speech as his opening parry, Defoe's anonymous accuser cloaked recrimination with rectitude:

I never expected to have had the occasion of entering the lists of concertation with Mr *De Foe*; but having in his printed History of the Union of *England* and *Scotland*, abused my good friend Mr *Clark*, I cannot contain my self from attacking him.³⁴

Whether the author was the Reverend James Clark, Minister of the Tron Church in Glasgow, or a 'good Friend' of his, 'concertation' or contention followed in a series of pamphlets published in Edinburgh between 1708 and 1710, in which accusations and counter-accusations were exchanged in what is usually called the Defoe-Clark controversy or quarrel.³⁵ Importantly, what were primarily contested in this dispute were the actual spoken and printed words used. In the *History* Defoe had virtually accused Clark of uttering some inflammatory words in a sermon, which provoked a riot. *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe* attacked Defoe for deliberately misrepresenting 'the rise and occasion of the rabbles at *Glasgow*', and accused him of 'bombastick slanting rodomontades' and 'calumnious misreports' injurious to Mr Clark's reputation.³⁶ The author also resorted to personal slurs: 'methinks *Mr Hosier*, should keep himself about peoples legs. . . but should not meddle with mens heads', a social snub no doubt influenced by the *Review Review'd*, published the previous year, which discredited Defoe as a 'broken hosier', and from which he quoted further in a postscript.³⁷ He disdained Defoe's 'virulent, but pithless pen-guns' and then proceeded to quote another author's personal attacks on Defoe as 'an hackney tool, a scandalous pen, a foul mouthed mongrel, an author who writes for bread and lives by defamation'.³⁸

³³ Anonymous, *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe* (Edinburgh, 1708), 2.

³⁴ Ibid, 1.

³⁵ Charles E. Burch, 'An Unassigned Defoe Pamphlet in the Defoe-Clark Controversy', *Notes & Queries*, 188 (1945), 185–7. Paula R. Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, 1989), 261. Hayton, 'Introduction' in Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 10. For a succinct overview, see *ibid.*, 26–7.

³⁶ Anonymous, *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe*, 1, 3, 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 6; Anonymous, *Review Reviewed* cited in Novak, 'A Whiff of Scandal', 39.

³⁸ *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe*, 6, 7. Going on the offensive with counter accusations was a quite typical response to perceived slander. M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1997), 9.

From 1706 Defoe suffered many such slurs, largely on account of his pro-union stance, for, as he expressed it in his *Review*, 'arguing and perswading all Men to Peace' frequently incurred the 'malice and raillery. . .and vile reproach' of his opponents.³⁹ In *An Answer to a Paper concerning Mr De Foe, against his History of the Union* (1708), he dismissed Clark's 'scurrilous reflections' on his character and challenged the minister to lay slander charges, for Defoe could bring forward witnesses who had been present at the Glasgow sermon and had transcribed Clark's words.⁴⁰ What he mainly addressed in this *Answer* were Clark's accusations that 'Mr De Foe errs egregiously in his narration of matters of fact, than which there cannot be a greater imputation on an *historian*', especially given his arrogant claim of 'being *one that will relate things, with all the impartiality possible, and that for the sake of history, he will transmit things faithfully to posterity*'.⁴¹ Illicit access to several pages from the unpublished *History* had enabled Clark to quote some of Defoe's own words and thus mock his claims to be a reliable and objective historian. These are charges Defoe refuted by reasserting his credentials as a historian and insisting that he had quoted Clark's sermon '*verbatim*' thus fulfilling 'the obligation of a historian to truth of fact'. Indeed Defoe went on to quote at length his own words from the *History* about the sermon inciting the riot, so that readers might judge the case for themselves, and also to illustrate his claims to have written 'an impartial history of fact'.⁴² He also upbraided the 'author' of *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe* with writing a 'scurrilous pamphlet. . .against a book that is not yet published'.⁴³

The Clark-Defoe 'paper war' continued for nearly two years as accusations and counter accusations of slander flew back and forth.⁴⁴ Renewed attempts by Clark to undermine Defoe's credibility as a historian were rebutted again and again by Defoe who, even when he finally agreed to alter the offending sheet and apologised for the 'mistake' by his printer that led to the continued circulation of some unaltered sheets, reiterated his conviction of 'the Truth and Impartiality of my History'.⁴⁵ His final, and apparently triumphant, attempt at maintaining the high moral ground took the form of reminding the Reverend Clark that:

³⁹ *Defoe's Review*, 13 May 1702, IV, 157.

⁴⁰ Daniel Defoe, *An Answer to a Paper concerning Mr De Foe, against his History of the Union* (Edinburgh, 1708), 1.

⁴¹ Clark, *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe*, 1, 3.

⁴² Defoe, *An Answer to a Paper concerning Mr De Foe*, 5, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁴ P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *Defoe De-Attributions* (London, 1994), 35.

⁴⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Advertisement from Daniel De Foe, to Mr Clark* (Edinburgh, 1710), 3.

Railing never mended an argument, many a good one has it marr'd, many a bad one made worse; I thank God, I have not been used to it, 'tis neither the sin of my education, or inclination; less still is it my talent, and least of all do I value it, when it flys at me from another; If it moves any thing in me 'tis my pity, for I take a man when he is come to railing to be but a few steps off, of distraction—And all men commiserate a lunatick, in short *passion and ill language* is below a gentleman, inconsistent with a wise man, remote from a good man, the disease of a learned man, and above all indecent and unbecoming a minister.⁴⁶

No known riposte from Clark survives, so it may be that he finally considered silence the more dignified response. Perhaps he recognised that Defoe was not the man to back down in a war of words, in spite of his artful admission that: 'I am very well content, to let him have the last word of fighting, as he had the first'.⁴⁷ Defoe, who had already proved his skill in his flyting with Belhaven only a few years earlier, had the last word here too.

II Defoe and the Darien Debate

In the wake of the Darien disaster, Scotland's ill-fated attempts to found a colony at Darien, on the isthmus of Panama between 1698–1700, there was a fierce pamphlet debate, which featured a high level of verbal aggression.⁴⁸ The perceived threat to Scotland's sovereignty was highlighted and became a major argument in anti-union pamphlets and newspapers.⁴⁹ Much of this oppositional literature expressed anger, grievance and a heightened sense of nationalism.⁵⁰ George Ridpath's tract, *Scotland's Grievances relating to Darien*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3–4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁸ The term 'disaster' was applied at the time by, for example, George Ridpath, *Scotland's Grievances relating to Darien* (Edinburgh?, 1700), 7, 10 and Defoe, *History of the Union*, 116. The widespread use of direct verbal aggression in these texts is discussed by Marina Dossena, 'Modality and Argumentative Discourse in the Darien Pamphlets' in Marina Dossena and Charles Jones (eds.), *Insights into Late Modern English* (Bern, 2003), 288–90 and more extensively in idem., 'Forms of Argumentation and Verbal Aggression in the Darien Pamphlets' in Brownlees (ed.), *News Discourse*, 235–54.

⁴⁹ Robertson, 'An Elusive Sovereignty', 200; Whatley, *Scots and the Union*, 214; Bowie, 'Public Opinion', 231, 236, 254.

⁵⁰ Robertson, 'An Elusive Sovereignty', 200–1; Bowie, 'Public Opinion', 241.

(1700), is a prime example. In impassioned terms, he described the interference of the English parliament as a provocative ‘act of hostility’ and an ‘outrage’ that demonstrated ‘contempt of our nation’.⁵¹ Royal proclamations, issued against the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa, the Indies and the Darien colony, were repeatedly condemned as an ‘invasion upon our sovereignty and freedom’.⁵² Polarisation is evident in Ridpath’s choice and juxtaposition of negative (‘them’/‘they’) and positive (‘us’/‘we’/‘our’) lexes.⁵³ For instance, all who opposed the establishment of the colony were ‘our Enemies’ and ‘the enemies of our nation’, whereas the colony projectors were ‘true Scotsmen’ and ‘true patriots’.⁵⁴ Emotive language is a marked feature of Ridpath’s rhetoric of patriotism.⁵⁵ He denounced ‘such a black piece of treachery. . . such rancour and malice’ and the part played by ‘pernicious counsellors’, the last phrase repeated five times, while the accusations of treachery, malice and rancour resound throughout the tract.⁵⁶

For all the emotionally-loaded vocabulary, *Scotland’s Grievances relating to Darien* demonstrates the argumentative skills of a seasoned polemicist who anticipates, and answers, possible objections:

If it be objected that His Majesty was obliged to publish those proclamations out of regard to the English nation and his foreign allies. *We answer* that His Majesty by his coronation oath as king of Scotland, is oblig’d to govern us by our own laws, and not by any consideration of foreign interests. . . .

Some we know will object that His Majesty did not refuse to receive the petition, though he would not allow my Lord Basil to present it. . . . *To which we can readily answer*, that this is the direct path to the tyranny of the late reigns, which ordered that no petition should be presented to the king but by his council.⁵⁷

Ridpath dismissed such objections as partisan—‘Whatever arguments the courtiers may pretend’—and he exposed the real motives behind their specious

⁵¹ George Ridpath, *Scotland’s Grievances Relating to Darien* (Edinburgh, 1700), 6, 29, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1, 5, 25, 52.

⁵³ Teun A. van Dijk, ‘Opinions and Ideology in the Press’ in Alan Bell and Peter Garrett (eds), *Approaches to Discourse* (Oxford, 1998), 33.

⁵⁴ Ridpath, *Scotland’s Grievances*, 2, 22, 52.

⁵⁵ The phrase is employed by Bowie, ‘Public Opinion’, 241.

⁵⁶ Ridpath, *Scotland’s Grievances*, 2, 5–7, 23, 27, 37, 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 9. Emphasis mine.

reasoning as a desire for ‘tyranny’ and ‘oppression’.⁵⁸ Throughout the tract he highlighted the threats offered to Scottish liberty, and then linked these to concerns about the projected union of the two nations, by pointing to the dangers if Scotland ignored the experience of history: for, he argued, Darien provided yet one more instance in a long line of English treacheries, going back as far as Edward I’s treatment of John Baliol. The emotional words of William Wallace, as rendered by George Buchanan and ‘English’d’ by Ridpath, provide the epigraph and subsequently inform the pervasive patriotic appeal of his tract:

You who had rather like cowards submit your necks to a yoke of ignominious slavery, than expose yourselves to any danger in asserting the public liberty; hugg that fortune which you value so highly: For my part, I shall cheerfully sacrifice my life to die a free-man in my native country.⁵⁹

As late as 1706 Ridpath and others invoked Scotland’s grievance relating to Darien in anti-union propaganda, which frequently features emotional appeals to nationalism.⁶⁰

In addressing this grievance in his *History*, and in order to counteract lingering anti-union sentiment, Defoe adopted the stance of a rational and impartial commentator. His upbringing as an English dissenter may well have influenced his declared commitment to, and frequent assertions of, the need to exercise reason, but his appeals to his readers’ powers of rationality were no doubt honed in his own pamphleteering and journalism.⁶¹ He discussed the contentious Darien issue as part of his ‘Summary Recapitulation’ of recent events that ‘tended to estrange the nations, and as it were prepare them for a breach, rather than a union’.⁶² His deliberately objective and rational analysis

⁵⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁹ Ibid., unpaginated.

⁶⁰ Ridpath, *Considerations upon the Union* (Edinburgh?, 1706); James Hodges, *Essay upon the Union* (London, 1706). In her analysis of pamphlets produced during the Anglo-Irish Union debate, Alessandra Levoratio notes that the use of reason is a feature of pro-union pamphlets while anti-union writers tend to employ more ‘emotionally-laden’ language. Alessandra Levoratio, ‘Wisdom, Moderation and Propaganda’ in Brownlees (ed.), *News Discourse*, 272, 275.

⁶¹ According to Penovich, the dissenting ideology to which Defoe subscribed ‘stressed that a man should exercise his reason to understand both divine will and the world around him’. Penovich, ‘From “Revolution Principles” to Union’, 242.

⁶² Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 113.

of the failure of the Darien enterprise largely comprised explanation, evaluation and elucidation.

Defoe began his account by recalling that the formation of the Scots Trading Company, or as he called it, the African Company, was 'ill-relish'd' by the English East India Company who had enjoyed exclusive rights to trade and, because certain matters were 'not rightly understood', Defoe undertook to 'set it [the whole matter] in a clearer Light'.⁶³ He then described the steps taken by the English Company, with the support of the English parliament and people, to oppose the Scots Company in their schemes to trade in the East Indies and set up a colony in Darien, carefully outlining why the whole enterprise lacked 'any rational probability of success'.⁶⁴ He cited lack of stock to trade, lack of foresight about the predictable reaction of the English Company, the settlers' insufficient capital and credit and, above all, organisational shortcomings, before concluding: 'This I think clears up the Case sufficiently. . . be the fault where it will'.⁶⁵ Although he thus apparently side-stepped the issue of blame to avoid stirring up old grievances, he found fault with the projectors of the Scots Company whom he accused of being 'exceeding short-sighted' and irresponsible when they 'played their other game of Darien'.⁶⁶ In these comments he used the device of a statement that begins with a concession to the projectors, followed by a criticism that is made all the more effective through his use of parallel structure and verbal repetition or near repetition:

If they imagined to obtain help from abroad, they indeed were in the right, for they could not but know, that the merchants in England would leap at a proposal to get into the East-India trade, free from the bondage of the Company mentioned before; *but if they imagin'd also*, that this could do less than embark the English government against them, and bring the publick to concern themselves about it, they were exceeding short-sighted, or must at the same time believe, the other very ignorant in the affairs before them. . . .

I do readily allow, the first scheme of a trade to the East-Indies had a probability of success in it, a thing *I can not grant* to the affair of Darren

⁶³ Ibid., I, 113. In 1695 the Scottish parliament established the trading company known as the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies. Initially this had King William's approval, but the English parliament, pressed by the East India Company, opposed all attempts at English and foreign investment in the new company.

⁶⁴ Ibid., I, 114.

⁶⁵ Ibid., I, 116.

⁶⁶ Ibid., I, 115.

[sic.]; which, I think had not one branch belonging to its contrivance, but what was big with necessary abortions.⁶⁷

This is the voice of reason pointing out foolish and irrational conduct: the Darien scheme, he said, was a ‘contrivance’, a ‘game’ and as ill-considered as other projects dreamed up through the ‘impracticable whimsy’ of the same projectors.⁶⁸ His lexical choices here certainly express negative evaluation, but he was also careful to elicit agreement by appealing to the common sense of his readers, particularly to those of more foresight, knowledge and sounder judgement than the projectors:

I cannot help saying had the managers of the Companies affairs had the least forecast of things, they could not but have expected all that happened here; and also might have known that, had they acted right, those proclamations could have done them no manner of damage.

Whoever has the least knowledge of the affairs of that country, and of the trade of the English colonies, must needs know that had the Scots Company who had plac’d themselves at Darien been furnish’d either with money or letters of credit, they had never wanted provisions, or come to any other disaster, notwithstanding the proclamations of the English against correspondence.

*Nor will any man be so vain to say that they ought to have ventured on such a settlement, depending on supplies from the English.*⁶⁹

The excerpt may begin within an apparent statement of his personal opinion, but as it proceeds it assumes a consensus of view before arriving at a univocal standpoint.⁷⁰

Like Ridpath, Defoe sought to shape contemporary public opinion, to influence attitudes and beliefs and, above all, to persuade readers to his point of view. The rational approach and language he employed, however, are all

⁶⁷ Ibid., I, 114, 115. My emphasis.

⁶⁸ Ibid., I, 115.

⁶⁹ Ibid., I, 115–16. My emphasis. Several years later Defoe admitted that the Darien venture could have been a success: ‘our brethren of Scotland fix’d a Colony, which if we had encourag’d, might by this time have been an excellent gooting for the South-Sea Trade’. *Defoe’s Review*, 3 July 1711, VIII, 174.

⁷⁰ Defoe uses this rhetorical strategy in other work, including his fiction. See Valerie Wainwright, ‘Lending to the Lord: Defoe’s Rhetorical Design in *A Journal of the Plague Year*’, *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 13 (1990), 59–72.

the more striking when compared to Ridpath's highly emotive and emotional rhetoric. Both were skilled and experienced polemicists, but where Ridpath's tract clearly appeals largely to its immediate audience, Defoe's *History* is aimed at another readership too, for he also had an eye to posterity. As he had said himself, 'tis necessary. . . to convey the right understanding of these matters to posterity'.⁷¹

III Conclusions

Defoe might have called for an end to the 'pen and ink war', but he remained an active combatant in the Union struggle for almost a decade. According to the *OED*, the expression 'war of words' is journalese for 'a sustained conflict conducted by means of the spoken or printed word; a propaganda war'. It therefore seems an appropriate term to use in relation to Defoe and the polemic associated with the 1707 Anglo-Scottish Union debate, much of which was published in the pamphlets and newspapers of the day as part of a propaganda campaign. The dictionary attributes the earliest known usage to Alexander Pope in 1725, and one imagines that the concept of a 'war of words' was already familiar to, and must have resonated with, his readers. For his part, Defoe never underestimated the power of words, for good or ill and, as his published dispute with the Reverend Clark illustrates, he was not inclined to retreat from the field of battle when verbal dominion—and all that it might represent—was at stake. He was nevertheless careful to indicate that the 'war' was not of his making, and that reconciliation rather than retaliation was always his aim. As we have seen, he condemned '*passion and ill language*', whether in a gospel minister or any other writer. 'Railing never mended an argument' he wrote, but reason might.⁷² He was good at coining expressions.

Defoe was a master of rhetoric before he became a master of fictions.⁷³ Linguistics scholars might say he was particularly adept in the deployment of communicative strategies. A closer look at only two samples of his writing in response to controversy relating to, and arguably contained by, his *History of the Union* reveals something of his command of language, particularly the language of persuasion, including reiteration, incorporation, balanced argu-

⁷¹ Defoe, *History of the Union*, I, 113.

⁷² Defoe, *Advertisement from Daniel Defoe, to Mr Clark*, 35.

⁷³ See Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe, Master of Fictions: His Life and Ideas* (New York, 2001).

mentation, appeals to reason and consensus-seeking. He might have had an eye on posterity, but he also had an ear for Scots, the language of his immediate audience, as the Scotticisms in his other publications demonstrate. How else did he learn about the art of flyting/fighting, and when, or when not, to display it?

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